

Lebanese parties jostle for votes; Arab League to monitor elections

Author:

Mon, 2022-03-14 23:04

BEIRUT: Arab League Secretary-General Ahmed Aboul Gheit has announced that his organization is ready to send a team to Lebanon to monitor the parliamentary elections scheduled for May 15.

"The Arab League has done this in Algeria, Iraq, Palestine, and many regions, and I think we will implement this in Lebanon," he said.

Aboul Gheit visited Lebanon on Monday as part of the arrangements for holding the Arab summit in Algeria on Nov. 1 and 2.

Lebanese President Michel Aoun met with Aboul Gheit and assured him that the elections will take place on time. According to Aoun's media office, he welcomed the idea of an Arab League team monitoring the elections.

With the candidacy deadline ending Tuesday midnight, the electoral competition has intensified between the large blocs who have started to announce their candidates. The number of newly registered candidates jumped to nearly 600 by Monday noon.

Sectarian polarization has started to trickle into electoral campaigns. Some parties, especially Hezbollah and its allies, have attacked foreign parties and their role in these pivotal elections.

Parties will be desperate for votes as the new parliament will elect the next Lebanese president in October.

FASTFACT

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As the political jostling heated up, former Prime Minister Fouad Siniora expressed a glum view about the future of the country.

In his statement on the 17th anniversary of the Cedar Revolution on March 14, he said: "I fear for Lebanon as it experiences some of its most difficult and bitter days. Lebanon's state has become dependent, its institutions have collapsed, its economy deteriorated and the Lebanese are waiting for crumbs of aid in the darkness and the cold.

"Meanwhile, the political tutelage of Iran and its armed party has

intensified in Lebanon, in light of constant opposition to political, administrative and financial reform.”

Siniora stressed the need to reconfigure and strengthen internal unity to save Lebanon from those who have hijacked it.

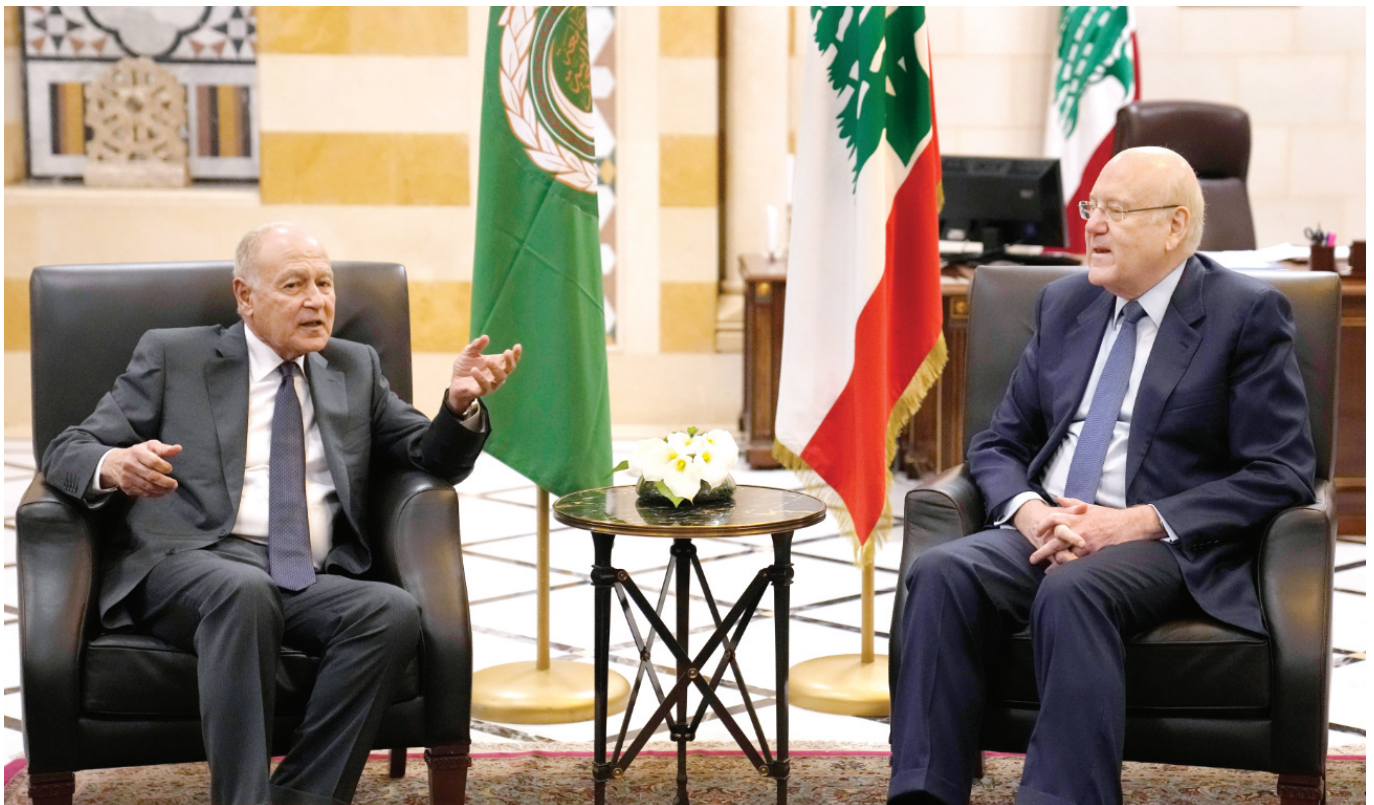
Meanwhile, Parliament Speaker Nabih Berri held a press conference in which he announced the names of the candidates of the Amal Movement and the Development and Liberation parliamentary bloc, days after his ally Hezbollah announced the names of its candidates.

“The elections are receiving unprecedented international and regional attention,” Berri pointed out.

“This attention, or rather this interference, has not receded. Some are expressing interest in good faith but others, and there are many, want to invest in the election results to create sectarian strife. These foreign parties are funding some Lebanese parties to achieve strategic political goals to change Lebanon’s identity,” Berri explained.

Samir Geagea, the head of the Lebanese Forces party, launched its electoral campaign, describing the upcoming vote as “an existential battle and not just a political one.”

Geagea added: “The Lebanese have three options in the upcoming elections: Those who want a state but cannot build it, those who do not want a state and are able to continue to obstruct its construction, and those who want a state and can indeed build it.”



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Lebanon PM Mikati says he will not run in May parliamentary election
Lebanon political factions gear up for May elections

Yemen's government vows to hunt down kidnappers of aid workers

Mon, 2022-03-14 22:27

AL-MUKALLA: Yemen's military and security authorities have vowed to hunt down the abductors of aid workers in the southeastern province of Hadramout as an international aid organization reduced humanitarian activities due to security concerns.

The government's security committee in Hadramout has ordered army units to remove unofficial checkpoints, intensify security measures throughout the province's fast lands and track down the armed men who are holding two international aid workers.

Security forces across the province also received similar orders from the ministry of interior to capture the abductors.

"We will be catching them sooner or later," a senior official at the ministry of interior, who spoke on condition of anonymity, told Arab News on Monday, adding that the ministry was still unaware of the abductors' identities and demands.

"They are a mix of drug addicts and terrorists," the official said.

Earlier this month, unidentified men kidnapped two foreign workers with the international medical charity Doctors Without Borders in a remote area between the city of Seiyun and Aber in the province of Hadramout.

Local media reports said that the abductors posed as military officers after setting up a fake checkpoint in Khoushem Al-Ain area, asked the German and Mexican workers and their Yemeni associates to board their Toyota pick-up, and quickly drove deeper into the desert.

The abduction prompted the MSF on Sunday into closing some of its humanitarian operations in the central city of Marib, a move that is expected to exacerbate the already dire humanitarian situation in the Yemeni city that hosts more than two million internally displaced people.

"Medecins sans Frontieres announces the closure of some of its humanitarian

activities in the Marib project, following the disappearance of two colleagues as they were on their way to the project," the medical charity said in a statement.

"We consider this as an unacceptable act of violence and we are concerned about the current exposure of the MSF teams in the area," it added.

The MSF said that it would shut down five out of eight mobile clinics operating in Marib and would completely withdraw support from Marib General Hospital.

In the southern province of Abyan, local officials said on Monday that talks to secure the release of five UN workers held by suspected Al-Qaeda militants reached a deadlock as the militants refused to free the hostages before the government met their demands.

The militants seek to swap the hostages with prisoners in Aden and have demanded a ransom of more than \$300,000.

Last month, the suspected Al-Qaeda militants abducted the five UN workers in Abyan's Moudia district while heading back to their office in Aden after a field mission.

Local officials told Arab News that the militants are holding the abducted workers in rugged and mountainous areas in Abyan and threaten to execute them if the army or security services use force to release them.

Despite the army and ministry of interior's stern orders for hunting down the abductors, critics have cast doubt over the ability of the country's poor security and military units to apprehend Al-Qaeda militants or drug dealers inside their safe havens in Abyan or Hadramout.

Yemeni officials have signaled they would seek to enlist the help of military officers from the US and Saudi Arabia.

Support for the local security service was discussed last week by the first undersecretary of the interior ministry, Maj. Gen. Mohammed Al-Sharef, with American and Arab coalition counterterrorism officers.

Quoting a Yemeni intelligence officer, Al-Ayyam daily newspaper reported last week that American officers have participated in the current efforts to hunt down the abductors in Abyan and Hadramout.

Despite their attempts to make a comeback in south Yemen provinces, Al-Qaeda in Yemen has suffered decisive blows over the past six years after Yemeni military forces, trained and armed by the Arab coalition, expelled them from their major urban and rural strongholds.



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Fighting rages outside Yemen's Marib as UN envoy meets leaders
Houthi bomb-maker killed in northern Yemen clashes

[Lebanon PM Mikati says he will not run in May parliamentary election](#)

Author:

Reuters

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Mon, 2022-03-14 15:25

BEIRUT: Lebanese Prime Minister Najib Mikati said on Monday he would not seek re-election in a parliamentary election scheduled for May 15.

The statement, made in a television address, throws Sunni Muslim politics in Lebanon into deeper disarray two months from a vote seen as important for reinvigorating public life in Lebanon in the third year of a financial crisis.

It follows an announcement by ex-Prime Minister Saad Hariri in January that

he would withdraw from politics and that his Future Movement, which now has some 20 members of parliament, would not field candidates.

Hariri is the top Sunni politician in a country where a power-sharing agreement dictates the prime minister must always be Sunni, the president a Maronite Christian and the parliament speaker a Shiite Muslim.

All seats in Lebanon's 128-member legislature are also allocated by religious sect, with 27 seats set aside for Sunnis – most of which are now up for grabs.

While announcing he would not run, Mikati called on Lebanese to turn out to vote and said his move aimed to "provide room for the new generation".

Hariri's decision had raised concerns about a potential boycott of the vote by Sunnis that could undermine the electoral process, though a number of other Sunni candidates are in the running.



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Cash or card? Confusion rages over Lebanon's new payment system

Egypt buys 126,000 tons of wheat from Russia, Ukraine as conflict rages on

Mon, 2022-03-14 18:28

CAIRO: Egypt has bought about 126,000 tons of wheat from Russia and Ukraine amid the ongoing conflict between the two countries.

The shipments, comprising about 63,000 tons from each side, are expected to arrive at Egyptian ports in the coming days, the Ministry of Supply and Internal Trade said.

The country has also bought about 63,000 tons of wheat from Romania and recently received a further shipment of the grain from France, it added.

The announcement came after Egyptian President Abdel Fattah El-Sisi recently met with the government to approve new incentives encouraging local wheat growers to increase their output during the current season.

Following the meeting a presidential spokesman said the talks dealt with “a review of the executive position on a number of national projects in the food security and agriculture sector,” including efforts to increase productivity.

“In this context, the president directed to grant an additional supply incentive to the price of local wheat for the current agricultural season, in order to encourage farmers to supply the largest possible quantity,” the spokesman said.

Egypt’s Minister of Supply Ali Al-Moselhi said the government aimed to purchase more than 6 million tons of local wheat during the current harvest season, which begins in mid-April.

Egyptian Prime Minister Mostafa Madbouly said on Wednesday that the country’s strategic reserve of wheat was sufficient to last for four months and that the government would not have to resort to buying further shipments from overseas before the end of the year.

Egypt is the world’s largest importer of wheat and buys most of what it needs from Russia and Ukraine.



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Ukraine crisis: Egypt explores alternative wheat sources, PM warns greedy traders
Egypt imposes export ban on green wheat, cooking oil, corn for 3 months: Ministry of Trade and Industry

[Egypt in talks with US defense company Lockheed Martin](#)

Author:

Mon, 2022-03-14 18:10

CAIRO: Mohamed Ahmed Morsi, Egypt's minister of state for military production, held talks with Raymond Piselli, vice president of Lockheed Martin, and Joseph Rank, CEO of the American defense company in Egypt, Saudi Arabia and Africa, on ways to enhance cooperation.

Morsi stressed the ministry's primary role, which is to meet the needs of the armed forces and police in terms of ammunition, weapons and equipment.

He also reviewed the manufacturing, technological and human capabilities of the military production companies and units that can be a point of cooperation with the American company.

Morsi noted the Ministry of Military Production's interest in benefiting from the expertise of Lockheed Martin, stressing the ministry's eagerness to localize the latest global technologies in military industries and conclude a strategic partnership in advance defense systems that would benefit both sides.

He referenced the recent economic reforms that Egypt implemented, which have contributed to the country's growing presence in the field of security and defense, evident in the organization of Egypt's Defense Exhibition at the end of last year.

Piselli gave a presentation on the American company, currently considered one of the largest military industry companies in the world, manufacturing radars, battle tanks, missiles, aircraft, train operating systems, flight training systems and technology laboratories.

He affirmed the company's interest in cooperating with Egypt in military manufacturing due to the country's significant capabilities in this field, which prompted Lockheed Martin to participate as a golden sponsor for the second edition of EDEX.

Rank stressed that military cooperation between the US and Egypt has been an essential component of their strategic partnership for nearly 40 years.

He added that Lockheed Martin adopts a three-pillar approach in its cooperation with partners, which includes knowledge transfer, localization of industries and human capital development.

He said that the company is keen to contribute to the development of the defense industries sector in partner countries.

Rank expressed his hope that this meeting would play an important role in opening new doors for investment and cooperation.



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